

From Offline to Online: Challenges and Opportunities for Entrepreneurship Education Following the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Without question, the global spread of COVID-19 poses a challenge to the higher education landscape at a magnitude we have not seen since the emergence of technology supported and online instruction. The impact of this hits entrepreneurship education classrooms especially hard. Thus, in this editorial, we discuss how the pandemic is impacting entrepreneurship education globally and call for additional scholarship and the development of additional resources for online entrepreneurship education.

Keywords

entrepreneurship education, online learning, COVID-19, coronavirus

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Without question, the global spread of COVID-19 poses a challenge to the higher education landscape at a magnitude we have not seen since the emergence of technology supported and online instruction. COVID-19 was declared a “public health emergency of international concern”¹ by the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee of the World Health Organization on January 30, 2020. Less than 2 months later, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic.²

As of the time of this editorial, COVID-19 has spread to more than 110 countries or territories internationally, including most of Europe, Asia, North and South America, and Australia, with over 370,000 cases and 4,600 deaths thus far. While speculation and uncertainty exist around the true threat the virus poses, the sheer numbers of those infected and the wide and rapid spread of the virus has placed COVID-19 in the global spotlight, necessitating organizations to begin exploring emergency preparedness plans and take precautions. Among the first to respond were governments who instituted travel bans to, from, and within certain regions. Large event organizers (e.g., SXSW, Coachella), sports events (e.g., National Hockey League, National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball, Formula 1, 2020, Olympic Committee), and corporations (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Google) have also taken a range of precautions including travel restrictions, event cancelations, remote work mandates, and events being held without spectators (Zraick & Garcia, 2020).

Universities, as conveners of large groups of people, had to establish similar precautionary measures to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on higher education and beyond. For instance, universities first implemented protocols for enhanced cleaning across campuses, disseminated messaging to remind, and encouraged behaviors such as frequently washing one’s hands, not touching one’s face, while also advising students, faculty, and staff to stay home if they feel ill. Rapidly, universities shifted their approach to more drastic measures by canceling large-scale and public-facing events, career fairs, conferences, and speaker events. Soon the magnitude of attention, the level of threat (and fear), public pressure, and the need to protect students has led many universities to take much more drastic action, causing many major institutions to extend spring breaks and shift to near mandatory campus-wide online education (Harvard, Cornell, City University of New York, the entire State University System of Florida, etc.³ In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic forced universities to switch their entire instructional apparatus to one of online delivery overnight. Thus, it is no longer a question of whether online education can deliver the promise of a quality higher education and rather one of how can universities immediately and effectively and embrace mass adoption of online learning.

This scenario poses not only a unique challenge but also a potential opportunity for entrepreneurship education. The integration of online learning in higher education over the last 20 years, while arguably substantive, still remains

slow to gain widespread traction, especially in entrepreneurship education. Deming et al. (2016) estimate that 5% of all U.S. bachelor's degrees issued were completed online, but this statistic is likely much lower when looking at entrepreneurship degrees in the same time period. While online entrepreneurship education is not novel, it has failed to gain widespread adoption, in part because contemporary approaches to entrepreneurship education stress the need for deliberate practice, real-world immersion, and experiential approaches (Kassean et al., 2015; Neck & Green, 2011; Neck et al., 2014). These three pedagogical approaches traditionally lend themselves to face-to-face instruction and can account for as much as 60% of classroom time and focus (Morris & Liguori, 2016). Moreover, even though hundreds of universities do offer online entrepreneurship education courses, two issues arise. First, from a macro perspective, relatively little is known with regard to the impact and effectiveness of online learning (McPherson & Bacow, 2015), with even less known within the context of entrepreneurship education. And second, the ability to effectively teach entrepreneurship online likely varies given the broad spectrum of learning objectives which inform our teaching and pedagogical considerations.

We posit that some aspects of entrepreneurship education lend themselves nicely to online instruction, whereas others require much more planning and deliberate thought to execute effectively. In attempting to answer the question "What should be the focus of our teaching?" Morris and Liguori (2016) offer three categories: business basics, entrepreneurship basics, and entrepreneurial mindset and competencies, illustrated in Table 1.

Speaking very generally, business students get most of their business basics from their business core classes and not solely or primarily from an entrepreneurship classroom, although there is overlap. Thus, the latter two categories (entrepreneurship basics; entrepreneurial mindset and competencies) represent the majority of what is taught in entrepreneurship classrooms across the globe. The dichotomy of these two categories is where the biggest challenge to widespread online entrepreneurship education lies: while teaching entrepreneurship basics seems to be well suited for traditional approaches to teaching online, teaching entrepreneurial mindset may require nontraditional and new approaches to online education.

Tools and resources to address this gap are slowly emerging, with traditional textbook publishers offering more and more online learning resources, private companies developing more and better online experiential learning curriculums, and simulation providers continuing to offer improved options. These disparate options noted, many entrepreneurship educators remain skeptical of the discipline's ability to effectively teach entrepreneurial mindset and competencies online at scale, and there is likely years of additional curricular and cocurricular pedagogical development and experimentation needed to alleviate the skepticism. Thus, only extreme circumstances are likely to meaningfully move the needle to shift more and more entrepreneurship classrooms online. We argue

Table 1. What Should Be the Focus of Our Teaching?

Business basics	Entrepreneurship basics	Entrepreneurial mindset/ competencies
Setting up the books	Entrepreneurship defined	Opportunity alertness
How to sell	Entrepreneurial process	Risk mitigation
Hiring of staff	Characteristics of entrepreneurs	Resource leveraging
Forms of enterprise	Types of entrepreneurs	Conveying a compelling vision
Cash flow management	Contexts for entrepreneurship	Value innovation
Formulating strategy	Innovative business models	Passion
Market analysis	Entrepreneurial cognition	Persistence and tenacity
Setting up operations	Nature of opportunity	Creative problem-solving
Pricing	Opportunity discovery/creation	Guerrilla behavior
Promotion and advertising	Seed and venture capital	Optimism
Financial statements	Lean start-up	Learning from failure
Franchising	Entrepreneurial orientation	Implementing change
Management control	Entrepreneurship and society	Adaptation
Cost analysis	Ethical challenges in entrepreneurship	Resilience
Protecting intellectual property		Building and using networks
Exit strategies		

Note. Adapted from Morris and Liguori (2016) with permission.

the COVID-19 pandemic may force us to approach this issue with a heightened sense of urgency.

This is not to say we believe online education should or even could replace traditional methods. Not at all. Rather, we are simply suggesting elevation of the conversation around online learning in entrepreneurship education and the need for higher levels of preparedness to quickly adjust our delivery modes depending on the situational and contextual circumstances we find ourselves in; sometimes by choice (e.g., teaching remotely while at a conference) and sometimes without (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic). In perhaps two ways, this is a sobering event for entrepreneurship education. First, we teach students to adapt to market conditions, to remain agile, and to innovate, so this is a great challenge for us to practice what we preach. Second, it is a humble reminder that we have not yet developed the tools and capacity necessary to teach all that we do effectively in an online format, despite there likely being much more capability to do so than we have let ourselves believe.

At *Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy*, this pandemic challenged us to scour our portfolio of published articles in search of resources and insights to help inform educators as they shift to online learning. In doing so, we realized just how little the journal has published in this area. Never in entrepreneurship education's history have we experienced such a widespread and abrupt rift;

faculty leading hundreds if not thousands of entrepreneurship classrooms across the globe must immediately shift their entire pedagogical approach to adapt to new contextual (market) conditions and forcing us to adapt and put the *improvement of practice* at the center of our work (Winkler, 2014). To help, for the next 30 days, SAGE Publishing is providing open access all of Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy (EE&P's) teaching cases in hope that these quality, timely, and peer-reviewed resources are of use to the global population of entrepreneurship educators. In addition, please consider this a *call to action* to document and collect data on the pedagogical and learning innovations created in your classrooms, especially with regard to online education. Our editorial team is eager to see these learning innovations submitted for future publication consideration. Together, we can move the needle to advance our field and improve our practice (and craft).

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Note

1. <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/30-01-2020-statement-on-the-second-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-%282005%29-emergency-committee-regarding-the-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-%282019-ncov%29>
2. <https://time.com/5791661/who-coronavirus-pandemic-declaration/>
3. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/09/us/coronavirus-university-college-classes/>

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